**Tips for Giving a Critique**

* **Maintain a helpful, positive mindset:** We are all here to help each other get to the next level in our writing.
* **Use the sandwich method:** When critiquing, start with something you liked, then provide constructive criticism, and end with something you liked. Depending on the format of the critique group, you may prefer to provide critique comments in chronological order, but it is always a benefit to sum things up at the end with an overall positive.
* **Use “I” statements:** Say “I found this part boring” rather than “This part *was* boring.” Remember, you bring your opinion, and you should always own it … keeping in mind that the writer does not have to agree with you.
* **Be specific:** Taking the above a step further, if you “found this part boring,” be sure to explain why. Was it too slow? Not descriptive enough? Not active enough? Why? Why? Why?
* **Offer suggestions:** If you “found this part boring,” offer ways to improve it, being careful not to change the fabric of the writer’s tone, point of view, voice, perspective, etc.
* **Don’t rewrite in your voice:** Although offering suggestions for a word change or, perhaps, rephrasing to clarify a sentence may be helpful, this is not your piece. Do *not* rewrite paragraphs, entire stanzas, or pages in your own voice.
* **Stay in your own corner:** The writer makes the ultimate decision whether to accept or reject your criticisms. Even if you really feel strongly that a change needs to be made (and quite possibly it does), recognize that the writer has final say over his or her own work. You’ve given your opinion. That’s what you’ve been asked to do. You’ve done it. The rest is up to the writer.
* **Never criticize the writer:** Discuss the writing, not the writer. Enough said.
* **Be kind:** Even if you hate a piece of writing, respect that the writer has invested his or her time and effort, AND willingly given you the chance to critique his or her work (a brave and sometimes scary act) regardless of the outcome. Be polite. Phrase your critique in a way that wouldn’t offend you if it were a critique of your own writing.

“Writing is a lonely job. Having someone believe in you makes a lot of difference.” —Stephen King

**Tips for Receiving a Critique**

* **No draft is perfect:** Whether it’s your first, second, or tenth draft, your work may still need improvement. That is why you are having it critiqued. Although the number of changes you make hopefully shrinks with each revision, don’t stress if a critique session still provides you with something new to think about and revise. Fresh eyes tend to catch problems you may have breezed over a gazillion times.
* **Don’t take it personally:** Criticism of your work is not criticism of you as a person. While you have put a lot of effort into your writing, be able to step back and look at it from a distance, gaining perspective of what you need to improve through the eyes of other readers.
* **Don’t get defensive in the moment:**You don’t need to defend your writing. Nobody is attacking it. Let it go, if you don’t agree with someone’s critique. You have sought their opinion. That does not mean you are required to follow his or her suggestions.
* **Answer the question:** While you should never feel you have to defend your work, if someone’s critique raises questions, be sure to explain what you meant. Clarifying may make everything better or (quite likely) will make holes in your work all the more clear. That’s a good thing, right? It can, ultimately, raise the level of your writing.
* **Recognize the majority:** More than one critique partner may have the same concern about your content. THAT is when you may wish to take a good, hard look at what you’ve written. If the content raises consistent comments, it is probably time to listen and make some changes.
* **Take opinions with a grain of salt:** You might think it’s perfect. Another may think it’s too long, and yet another may think it’s too short. Just because something is suggested does not make it the best solution for your work.
* **Listen. Don’t just hear:** While the ultimate decision of what goes into your work is yours, don’t dismiss criticism that is harsh or might be difficult to implement. Truly listen to the point behind the criticism. Sometimes the hardest advice can be the most worth following. Be open-minded. The more you listen and see improvements, the easier it is to accept critique suggestions in the future.
* **Wait:** After receiving a critique, let it sit for a day or week before revising. After a proper wait, only make those changes that still ring truest to you.
* **Remember, ownership is yours:** Listen to what people feel does not work, and then figure out how (**or even if**) you want to fix it. It’s your work, your choice, your decision.